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Advice from MPI for Veterinarians and Practice Principals: Voluntary Bonding Scheme for Veterinarians (2016)

To address shortages of veterinarians working with production animals, the Government offers a Voluntary Bonding Scheme for Veterinarians. A taxable payment of \$11,000 for every year, up to five years, is available to recent Massey veterinary graduates who work in eligible practices and who have been accepted into the scheme.

Each year there are 30 places available for new Massey graduates. If MPI receives more than 30 applications, there is a ballot to decide the 30 applicants to be accepted for that year.

Click [here](#) for further information and the terms and conditions of the scheme (<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/funding-and-programmes/farming/vet-bonding-scheme/>)

How to apply

Applications must be made using the online MPI grants portal.

All applications to enter the Vet Bonding Scheme must be submitted through the portal which opens on Tuesday 9 February. To be eligible for consideration applications must be submitted before 3pm on Tuesday 23 February 2016.

Further information on using the portal and an application guide will be provided on the [MPI website](#) in early February. The guide will include information on how to apply online and the supporting documents needed (which include details on the practice's eligibility and the applicant's job description).

If you have any questions prior to the commencement of the round please contact MPI directly by emailing funding@mpi.govt.nz or phoning Jessica Tramoundanas-Can on 04 894 0683.

What happens when someone notifies Council about you?

If someone raises a concern or makes a formal complaint about you, you will likely hear from one of the Helens. Helen Arbuckle (Deputy Registrar – Standards) deals with formal complaints and Helen Shanks (Executive Officer) handles those issues which are raised as concerns as well as providing executive support. We both joined the VCNZ team in March 2015.

No one likes to receive the phone call letting them know that someone is unhappy with the service they provided, but we try and make the process run as smoothly as possible to make

it less stressful if we can. We are always happy to talk with vets (and complainants) about the process and try to give an indication of how long things are likely to take.

The process

Council has two processes to deal with concerns and complaints. Generally, the way we address an issue will depend on what the person who raises it with us is seeking. Some people want matters to be considered a formal complaint. If they tell us this, we are obliged (under the Veterinarians Act 2005) to refer the matter to a Complaints Assessment Committee (CAC). If someone wants to alert us to a concern, but not necessarily raise a formal complaint, this is referred to the Notification Review Group (NRG).

Our targets are to close concern cases within 4 months, and complaint cases within 6 months. These processes can take some time for the following reasons.

- The committee members that consider matters for Council undertake this work on a part time basis.
- Parties must be given adequate time to consider and respond to information.
- Parties may wish to consult with others (eg their indemnity insurer).
- The committee may wish to meet with the parties for some discussion.
- Other information (including expert opinions may need to be sought).

Both the CAC and the NRG act as screening bodies for the Council. We are currently updating the website so it has more information about the complaints and notification processes, and the difference between the two. See <http://vetcouncil.org.nz/complaintsPubInfo.php>

The Notification Review Group (NRG)

The NRG (comprising 3 vets and 1 layperson) considers 'concerns'. In almost all cases, the NRG is likely to want to seek the vet's comments in response to the notification. (If the NRG does not consider that any action is required, it can close the case. We'll let the vet know that this has happened, and they'll be given a chance to comment.)

If the NRG decides they would like a response from the vet, we will phone the vet to let them know that we have received a concern, and what the next steps are. We'll follow up with an email outlining the process, what to expect, and what we need.

The NRG may:

- refer the matter to council if there are concerns about the vet's competence or health
- refer any matters requiring further investigation to a Complaints Assessment Committee
- make recommendations to the veterinarian on how to improve their practice; or
- decide that no further action is needed.

The members of the NRG are:

- Dr Stuart Burrough (Chair)
- Dr Emma Cuttance
- Dr Craig Hunger
- Ms Ruth Renner (layperson)

The Complaints Assessment Committee (CAC)

The CACs (comprising 2 vets and 1 layperson) are appointed by Council to consider formal complaints. If we receive a complaint we'll contact you by phone to let you know what will happen next. It's likely that you'll be asked to provide a response to the complaint.

The CACs work to identify the issues/events that led to a complaint, and where appropriate, they recommend ways of preventing recurrences, generally through education and other

non disciplinary means. Disciplinary action is a last resort in circumstances where there have been repeated or reckless breaches of standards or where the veterinarian has acted with wilful disregard to the profession's requirements.

A CAC may:

- recommend ways for the vet to improve his or her practice
- initiate mediation between the vet and the complainant
- recommend that the vet undergo a medical and/or competence assessment
- recommend that conditions be placed on the vet's practice
- recommend to the Council that the vet's practising certificate be suspended pending medical or competence assessment or disciplinary hearing
- take no further action
- lay disciplinary charges, if the alleged breach of professional conduct standards is serious enough to require disciplinary sanction.

There are two standing CACs with the following membership.

- Dr Mark Simpson (Chair)
- Dr Phil Watson
- Ms Sue D'Ath (layperson)

- Ms Victoria Hinson (Chair and layperson)
- Dr Neil Houston
- Dr Warwick Baldwin

Council also maintains a panel of vets available to serve on CACs in case a standing member of a CAC is unavailable.

CAC outcomes

The CAC is obliged to provide Council with a written statement setting out its findings. These statements issued by the CACs are generally anonymised and published on the Council website. (There are occasions where anonymity can't be guaranteed due to relevant but clearly identifying details, and in these instances, the CAC will advise that these decisions are not to be published.) Statements can be found on the website at <http://vetcouncil.org.nz/cacdecisions.php>

A new feature of the written statements is the inclusion of 'Learnings for the Profession' when this is appropriate. These are short statements which summarise one or more important issues that vets may find helpful when reflecting on their own practice (and how to avoid complaints!).

In future, E-updates will include examples of these 'learnings' as well as a reference to recently published decisions. The first of these is below.

Learnings for the profession

[CAC14.27](#)

Case summary

The Complainant notified Council about issues relating to the euthanasia of her cat. These included the veterinarian's manner, choice of medication, the physical environment in the clinic and the lack of staff support. She also reported the clinic's failure to provide her with the cat's clinical records when she requested them and its refusal to release the cat's ashes

until the bill had been paid in full. The CAC noted that, while there were discrepancies between the information provided by the veterinarian and the outcome of an audit of the management software, there were no issues which met the threshold to require any formal disciplinary action. It did however recommend that the clinic's policies and protocols be reviewed and that staff review how these are communicated to clients. For full details, please [click here](#).

CAC Outcome

The CAC considered that while not all the requirements of the Code and the Competency Standards were met in this case, any non-compliances did not meet the high threshold required for disciplinary action.

Learnings

- It is in a practice's best interest if policies regarding account payment clearly indicate the clinic's practice regarding the release of an animal's body or ashes when monies are still owing for treatment undertaken. Advising clients whether payment for cremation is sufficient to ensure the release of ashes (even when other amounts may be outstanding) may avoid further distress for owners, avoid confrontations for administration staff and reduce the risk of a complaint for the veterinarian.
- While there may be occasions when amendments to clinical records are necessary, the Code of Professional Conduct is clear that *'any additions or deletions made at a later time must be done with clear reference to the date/time that these changes were made'*. (Explanatory notes – Section 4, Veterinary Services.) An audit of clinic software can indicate precisely when notes were added, amended or deleted or if there are any 'glitches' in the system. Such an audit may be commissioned when there is any doubt about the information provided to an investigation by a CAC.